CHRISTIAN DRAMA

edited by
JOHN HESTER
cover designed by JOHN PIPER

HOLBROOK LIBRARY
PACIFIC SCHOOL
OF RELIGION

Contents

	Page
EDITORIAL	3
OLD AND NEW IMAGERY IN RELIGIOUS DRAMA, by *Raymond Chapman*	4
CORRESPONDENCE: THE PORTRAYAL OF CHRIST IN DRAMA	18
EVANGELISM AND DOROTHY L. SAYERS, by *Philip Turner and Patrick McLaughlin*	21
APPEAL FROM SWEDEN	22
AUDIENCE ON TRIAL, by *Capella*	23
LONDON THEATRE, by *John Hester*	26
ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY	31
FAR AND WIDE	34

All opinions expressed in these pages are personal, and are not necessarily those of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain

l. 3 Number 10 **Summer, 1958**

Published by:
THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN
166 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, LONDON, W.C.2
Telephone: COVent Garden 3304/5

CHRISTIAN DRAMA: 6/6 per annum (post free)

RENÉE ASHERSON AND VIRGINIA MASKELL IN "THE CATALYST", BY RONALD DUNCAN

(*Houston Rogers*)

EDITORIAL

Comment on the problem of whether or not Our Lord should be represented on the stage has been lively, in response to the remarks in these columns in our Spring number, and part is quoted in the following pages.

Since the Spring however interest in the hoary question of the Lord Chamberlain's censorship of stage plays has quickened very noticeably, largely as a result of a prosecution case involving the enterprising Theatre Workshop at Stratford East. The case on both sides has been stated and restated in the press, and its principles are too well known to demand repetition here. That the whole situation is anomalous surely no one can deny. Mr. Samuel Beckett's intriguing play *Endgame*, reviewed in its published translation later in this number, has been refused a licence in English although the author's original version in French was publicly acted at the Royal Court with the censor's blessing! And the growth of the Theatre Club system, while enterprising and a boon for intelligent playgoers, is ridiculous and hypocritical in its necessity. There is no lack of public concern over controversial plays produced, and the granting or witholding of box-office support may well be a sufficient censorship in itself, as is virtually the case with the printed word. The public is there protected by law from the flourishing of vicious pornography, the rest depends upon the publishers who in turn depend upon the decency and good sense of the vast majority of readers. Might not a similar procedure work well in the theatre also? Let managements take a lesson from the New Shakespeare Theatre at Liverpool, which recently presented Mr. Tennessee Williams' brilliant *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Comment on this production was lively, and in response Mr. Sam Wanamaker, the Director of the theatre, called a public meeting at which informed people—doctors, social workers, and the like, together with members of the cast—would discuss the play with all who were interested; Mr. Wanamaker meanwhile wrote to say that in the discussion he would make mention of a notice of the play's London production in *Christian Drama*, Spring 1958.

The other controversy of recent months which directly concerns readers of this magazine is of course the strange story of what came to be called the Cathedral Ballet. The exciting hints which we reported last time from the lips of the Bishop of Coventry became facts when Independent Television gave the Festival Ballet the chance of publicly offering their art to Almighty God as an act of deliberate dedication, a chance they had originally hoped to have taken up before several hundreds of people in the ruins of the old Cathedral at Coventry. That this was transformed into an act of witness before countless thousands, with introductory words from the Bishop himself, was achieved through the activity of the Lord's Day Observance Society, who threatened to have the law on anyone who dared to perform in the Cathedral ruins on a Sunday. One cannot in the event be too grateful to the Diocesan authorities, A.B.C. Television and the artists concerned for such a magnificent reminder of the glorious all-embracing nature of the worship which we are capable of offering to God, for his glory and the benefit and ultimate refreshment of our souls.

OLD AND NEW IMAGERY IN RELIGIOUS DRAMA

By RAYMOND CHAPMAN

From time to time, all Christians are likely to utter their worship in th words of the Hebrew Psalmist:

> " Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from th presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make m bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy han lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

They find no difficulty in this apparently strange juxtaposition of ideas, i which a spirit can have a hand and the morning be furnished with wings. Th images here used have passed so firmly into Judaeo-Christian religious lan guage that they have acquired a communicative value far beyond their norma meaning. The Christian, reading back his own faith into earlier times, wi think of Christ's descent into hell and Ascension, and of the credal phras " at the right hand of the Father ". The wings of angels and of the dove tha is the Paraclete, the innumerable literary associations which make the sea a once a place of awe, of change and of exile—all these run through the verse which too often pass the lips of sleepy congregations without the considera tion that they deserve.

The unbeliever, on the other hand, may well be roused to indignant scor by this apparent surrealism. If he is of a philosophical turn of mind, he ma demand to be given a definition of what we mean by " spirit ", " heaven and " hell ". He will ask whether we really believe that heaven is somewher directly above the earth and hell beneath. He will accuse us of adhering to a outworn mythology, framed by men whose knowledge of astronomy wa distinctly inadequate.

The difficulty of communication which thus arises is to some extent pa of the common problem of language. Like any artist, the writer is eve conscious of the inadequacies of his medium. There are times when the mean of communication seem to fall hopelessly short of the vision that is to b expressed. Can words ever re-create experiences that seem to have n common referent? Words are fraught with mundane associations, th commonplace meanings of daily intercourse. Can they be put together in manner that will rise above the trivia of the breakfast-table? The answer mus be, yes, if the possibility of great literature being written is to be admitte Words cannot be changed, if language is to remain a social act, but th breakfast-table may be sanctified through them. The writer breaks through with a despair that is too strong for silence. " The question is, which is to b master—that's all," said Humpty-Dumpty.

It is particularly in the attempt to communicate religious experience that nagery becomes necessary. Here the ordinary process of sensory perception nd interpretation breaks down. It was very likely in the field of religion that an first came to know the need for imagery. In the words of a modern poet:

> " Such experience can only be hinted at
> In myths and images."

he most profound of all states through which our human nature can pass, something that cannot be communicated merely by making a satisfactory lection and arrangement from current usage. Here there are things which ave no precisely-agreed counterparts in everyday life but which yet can be ansmitted to others only through the medium of language. They belong to e highest degree of experience.

For there are perhaps three levels on which communication can be effected. asic physical needs and emotional reactions can be expressed in a few olated words. The man who knows the words for " hungry " or " cold " any language may expect some response if he utters them without the aid grammar. Indeed, language may be dispensed with altogether in favour pointing to the mouth or shivering and wrapping the arms closely around e body. There is little difference in kind, though a great deal in degree, tween what is felt on seeing such a gesture and on reading the first stanza *The Eve of St. Agnes.*

Since no individual or community can be satisfied for long with shivering d pointing to their mouths, language expands as needs become more mplex. On its second level, it enables men to say that they have been ngry for three hours, or that they require a certain kind of food. It can peal to memory and expectation; it can give reasons for following a certain urse of action. Language develops until there are verbal equivalents for known situations and needs, together with the means of showing how they e related in space and time. Yet this level too is soon transcended. No e doubts the validity of saying, " I am cold," but there is not the same equacy in saying, " I am in love " or, " I am grateful to God." Therefore ew element appears in language; the known material world is called in to ist the weakness of words.

If we try to explain the meaning of an English word to a foreigner, it is not ways easy to find an exact synonym or explanatory phrase. We therefore scribe instead the kind of situation in which the word might be used: planation is replaced by example. The growth of imagery is similar. It mes from a comparison between a general idea and a particular object, ich may be called the referent. As the image becomes familiar, the actual mparison is not explicitly made. Imagery is the shorthand of simile; the ject used to exemplify the original idea is able to stand alone and to assume qualities of the idea itself. Here, and in what follows, I use the word *agery* to mean the verbal expression of such implied comparisons. More ely, *symbolism* may cover visual and extra-linguistic presentations. It is

possible for words themselves to become images and to stand for a whol complex of ideas far beyond their usual semantic meaning. There is dange of a kind of verbal idolatry in the insistent but unthinking use of words lik Grace, Redemption, Heaven, without any attempt to arrive by norma mental processes at the meaning theologically intended by them.

The comparison of qualities between the concrete and the abstract ha created the familiar images of traditional religious language. Judaism show the development of the idea of God from the Yahweh of the Pentateuch, tribal deity and commander expressed in images of battle and the destructio of enemies. Gradually the belief is purified until the cognate ideas of guidanc and leadership bring the great image of the Father which extends into Christ anity. Then came further images of protective love—the Shepherd, th farmer preparing for harvest, the host inviting to a feast. Or again, th human situation is expressed in the Bible in two sets of images. To the Jew of the Old Testament, this world was an alien shore, a place of exile—an ide which became very strong after the captivity in Babylon. At the same tim those who feel this sense of exile must feel also the desire to reach the tru life, the Promised Land. Therefore there is both static and dynamic imager On the one hand, there is the idea of patient waiting, of the flock without shepherd, of captivity and restraint. At the same time, there are images o movement and conflict: the world seen as a perpetual battlefield, a wa against the powers that block the way to salvation. There is also the sense o journey, a long pilgrimage to the desired goal. The river-crossing or th sea-voyage appear in the stories of birth and death in many cultures. Th births of the Jewish Moses and the Saxon Scyld, the deaths of Hiawatha an Bunyan's Christian, to say nothing of the infernal rivers in Homer, Virg and Dante—all these suggest that this world is but one stage on a journe separated from the greater reality by hard but not impassable barriers.

Now it is clear that we can no longer rely on these traditional images fo the communication of religious aspiration and experience. To some exten this failure is a part of the general fragmentation of modern culture. The is now no commonly-accepted background of belief from which imagery ca be drawn. Human experience tends more and more to fall into specializ categories; and belief has given way to the feuds of opposed ideologie There is a vicious circle in the loss of faith and the failure of imagery. Whe men no longer believe, the images of belief revert to the mundane form their referents and all their power is lost. Also the recovery of belief is mad more difficult by the absence of images through which belief can be direct communicated. This is a dilemma common to all imaginative writers at th present time, but the Christian writer has the greatest problem.

The traditional images of Christianity were designed for the transmission doctrines to a small and predominantly rural community, to people for who the relationships of the family were all-important. It is quite obvious th the situation of modern man is entirely different. In western Europe at leas the basis of his culture is urban. He lives out of touch with the land and th

changing rhythms of the year. The writing of nature-poetry, which was at one time quite literally the natural thing to do, is now scarcely possible. Loyalties now are often primarily to a theory or a party rather than to immediate relatives or neighbours. Therefore the modern religious dramatist has to do some hard thinking before he begins to write.

The linguistic usage of a group holding a common belief always tends to be more conservative than that of ordinary speech. As the circle of believers grows smaller and of less social importance, the tendency to cling to old forms becomes stronger. " If they spoke and wrote thus in the ages of faith, how can we do better? The world around us is secular and materialistic. It has rejected our message, and we will therefore refuse the words in which its own false message is newly expressed." So runs the argument, whether or not it is consciously so stated. The dramatist who tries to break away from traditional modes of expression may find himself taxed with infidelity by those who share his faith. In this country, particularly, we tend to attach almost excessive devotion to the verbal forms of the Book of Common Prayer and the Authorised Version of the Bible. This ready-made language is a temptation, since those who already believe will at once be put in a receptive frame of mind by the sound of verbal images associated with public devotion.

Yet unless some attempt is made to offer new imagery, the mass of unbelievers will decide that they are being offered " the same old stuff " and will pay no more attention. There are three reasons for which traditional religious imagery no longer communicates universally. Some of the referents may be completely unknown. The parable of the Sower makes little sense unless there is understanding of the old broadcast method, with the seed exposed to all the perils of sun and wind, rocks and birds. There is no reason why a whited sepulchre should be associated with hypocrisy, unless we can picture the tombs at the side of the Jerusalem road, newly whitened so that the Passover pilgrims should not inadvertently touch them and become ritually unclean. Nor do the tearing of garments or the excessive size of phylacteries seem likely to make modern people pharisaical. Nor does the very adjective pharisaical convey its meaning unless one knows of the excessive devotion of the Pharisees to the outward signs of the Law.

These are matters easily ignored without serious loss. But the secondary problem is presented by those images which, though their referents are not completely unknown, are at least unfamiliar. There can be little response to images of the lamb or the lilies of the field for those who know lamb only as meat to be cooked and lilies only as something in a florist's shop. The shepherd is not an unknown figure, but few people to-day have seen one, and fewer regard him as the very type of self-sacrificing protection. Trees bud and shed their dusty leaves even in city streets, but their yearly rhythm of life and death is scarcely noticed by the hurrying millions. The tree no longer seems a type of human existence; and neither the fatal tree of Eden nor the redeeming tree of Calvary comes to many minds.

A third aspect of this problem lies in those images whose referents are still familiar but whose manner of communication has changed. Freud and his

REX HARRISON AND MARGARET LEIGHTON IN " THE COCKTAIL PARTY ", BY T. S. ELIOT

(*Anthony Buckley*)

followers have struck hard at one of the oldest of religious images—the Father. Wise protection now gives place to inhibition and dark desires. So too, in this age that claims democracy, all the images of individual leadership are suspect. The dictum of Lord Acton that all great men are bad would be echoed by those who follow the cult of the " little man ". Not that the little man is essentially unheroic: he may take his place in the eternal myth, as James Joyce for one has shown us. But his elevation has meant the corresponding fall of many traditional type-heroes, both religious and secular.

Now there is of course plenty of scope for direct communication even in the mist of this apparent breakdown. Old memories and associations are

not completely shattered by new attitudes and the image may outlive the culture in which it was formed. The evocative value of the image does not depend solely on personal familiarity with the referent. Historical events may assume a symbolic significance long after that which actually happened has been almost forgotten. The strange blending of Christianity, Celtic myth and early history which gave us the Arthurian legend still has power as a poetic theme. Generations of poets, including several of our own time, have found it able to express their own quest for the unattainable ideal, the hopeless loyalty, the broken union. In more recent history, the Jacobite story can still evoke a response in people who have little interest either in Scotland or in who sits on the British throne to-day. If the event or the object awakens a response in the heart, neither factual significance nor personal familiarity is of prime importance.

Yet this response is in fact seldom awakened in more than the isolated individual, unless agreement and understanding precede communication. Even among believers, the response may be artificial, a falling into conditioned attitudes of devotion without true reverence. If the same response is sought among unbelievers, the writer is likely to be met with incomprehension or derisive suspicion. The occasional endurance of a traditional image in a few imaginative minds who accept the symbolism while rejecting the substance, should not make us think that our task is easier than it is. Few things are so fatal to artistic integrity as imagery that has deteriorated and lost its force. Imagery has its clichés as much as does ordinary language. The degeneracy of a literary movement may be sought in its continuing use of images from which the life has departed. The imagery of the Romantic Movement can be traced in its slow decline through the nineteenth century, handed on from one generation to another until the clear features of the original were blurred by continual handling. Its nadir is to be found in the lyric of the modern popular dance-tune, where a whole plethora of roses, ruins and moonlight carries the sickly, sentimental lack of true feeling.

This danger, common in its different modes to the artist in any medium, is especially perilous to the writer on religious themes. Language and imagery that offer immediate communication with those who share his faith may alienate those whom he most desires to reach. This type of language is difficult to handle well, because an external compulsion has preserved it after its living use and force have gone. Dynamic art cannot succeed in a static medium. This can be proved from a study of almost any English hymn-book, where writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are found waging a losing battle with the intricate conventions of sixteenth-century language. In the hands of one who uses the dead idiom without the living faith to support it, the effect is far worse. Thus in Oscar Wilde's *Salome:*

> " Where is she who gave herself to the Captains of Assyria, who have baldricks on their loins, and tiaras of divers colours on their heads? Where is she who hath given herself to the young men of Egypt, who are clothed in fine linen and purple, whose shields are of gold, whose helmets are of silver, whose bodies are mighty ? "

Thus are Renaissance prose and Hebrew imagery mingled in a sensuous rhythm that is entirely without meaning. A similar fault, without even the undertone of religion, appears in the revival of poetic drama towards the end of the last century. Poets tried to knit up the broken thread of Elizabethan blank verse and produced this kind of thing:

> " I have fled for ever: have refused the rose
> Although my brain was reeling at the scent.
> I have come hither as through pains of death;
> I have died, and I am gazing back on life."

That was perhaps the best of them, Stephen Phillips, a writer with true poetry in him who never discovered a living dramatic idiom through which to express it. Others were less happy, as for instance Rudolf Besier:

> " I saw it in the splendour of the noon,
> I saw it in the purple dusk of dreams,
> And in the sunset ritual of gold,
> And in the silver spirit of the dawn,
> And in the white and lovely mountain-tops,
> And moving like a vapour on the sea,
> I saw that face."

This is end-stopped verse of the type found in early Tudor drama, creaking with decadent Romantic imagery. As Johnson said of Ossian, " A man might write such stuff for ever if he would but abandon his mind to it ". The time had not yet come for verse-drama that could find expression in imagery that should be elevated yet of wide communication.

Has that time come to-day? There is every indication that it has, though the problem has by no means been solved by even our best religious dramatists. It is not a problem that ends simply through an exercise of the will. It may be tempting to say that, since no traditional imagery can now communicate to all sections of the population, a new imagery must and can be devised. Surely there are referents which everyone can use as a basis for poetic understanding? Is there not the power of a great machine, the upward striving of a tall building, the new miracles that send sound and vision on invisible waves through the air? Can we not express through these works of our hands the ultimate glory of God the Creator?

So have some optimists argued. But, unfortunately perhaps, dramatic imagery is not something that can be added as a final adornment. It is not possible to keep a regular supply from which pieces may be extracted to fit the play. Dramatic imagery must spring from both situation and character. It must, in the first place, be suitable to the whole theme of the play. A light comedy, however poetic, will find no place for images of battle and violence. Again, imagery must arise naturally from the various characters and must help to bring out each individual development and the interplay of all together. A study of imagery in Shakespeare leaves no doubt of how the skilful dramatist can make his imagery a part of his total dramatic statement.

imagery must remain coherent even while it develops with the development of the play itself. This does not preclude a startling juxtaposition of contrasting images for special effect, provided only that each one separately contributes something to the whole.

Therefore the religious dramatist cannot use imagery simply because it appeals to him in itself or seems likely to communicate to a wide audience. He must be satisfied that it arises from his own religious vision and is able to express that vision without distortion. Hence comes the tension in the present situation. The dramatist must justify himself on the one hand against those who object to the presentation of religious themes in any but the traditional modes. There are some who would regard any departure from Biblical imagery as in bad taste or perhaps even blasphemous. On the other hand, there are well-wishing enthusiasts who rejoice too freely in the modern world and urge its referents forward as fit media for the imagery of any possible experience or attitude. The dramatist who wishes to preserve both his religious conscience and his artistic integrity must keep a middle course. It may perhaps be added that if he does violence to either of these things, he will almost certainly damage the other.

The problem is twofold. First, there are those events and situations which seem to be existentially new and for which there is no traditional mode of expression. It may indeed be argued that there can be nothing completely new since all things are contained in God's foreknowledge. Nevertheless, things do manifest themselves in ways not seen before, and it may be necessary to isolate some aspect of the new referent that can serve to communicate all which the novelty presents in its effect on human life. It has been remarked that it is a sad comment on our civilisation that the only symbol which seems to communicate directly and generally the use of atomic power is the rising mushroom-cloud of the atomic bomb.

Secondly, there is the need to find new imagery for things which are as old as humanity. This is the chief purpose of the serious dramatist—to extract the essence of human experience, to impose order and coherence upon it so that every individual experience can grow richer from what is presented. Can traditional imagery still be said to communicate in this way, since the experiences themselves perhaps have not greatly changed? Or must we not accept the fact that most people live by the accident rather than the essence and must be approached through familiar externals?

Certain traditional images do indeed endure and seem unlikely to be superseded. Those which attended the birth of certain aspects of divine revelation, and the formulation of certain doctrines, have become inextricably part of that which they represent. They may communicate to the unbeliever, provided his knowledge attaches them correctly. There are beliefs so fundamental that no ingenuity is likely to affect the real issue of acceptance or rejection. And from the position of acceptance, understanding is perhaps best heightened by the wisdom of earlier days. Thus traditional images may serve to link faith and imagination, without subordinating one to the other.

It is perhaps through this link that the work of art with full commitment ma be distinguished from the straightforward statement of dogma.

A momentary digression into visual art may be helpful. The Christia painter, preparing to depict the activity of the Holy Ghost, is not trying t make an illustrated theological treatise in which " every picture tells a story " His imagination will set to work in the realm of mass, line and colour; bu certain symbols will present themselves to him. He will think of flame, dove, cloven tongues, a great wind—because it was in those ways that certai divine appearances were made to men. The painter's imagination therefor will probably find a mode of expression which embodies one or more of then Now, returning to the writer, and taking an example from a non-dramati religious poem, let us consider these lines:

" The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error.
The only hope, or else despair,
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
To be redeemed from fire by fire."

The problem of understanding here lies not in the referents of the symbol used but in the doctrinal points which those symbols present. This is indee a strange juxtaposition with which to confront the uninstructed: dove, flam and tongue consort ill together unless they are understood as symbolizin aspects of the Holy Ghost revealed to men. The poet has here chosen thos images and made them part of his own vision, then expressing it through th poetic means of rhythm, rhyme and alliteration. That achievement in itsel may be its own justification, but the creative process is not complete until awakens some response in the reader other than admiration for technica skill.

Another example of traditional imagery still in vigorous use is the idea o the garden. It is an image of the lost innocence of childhood, the enclose world of security where all questions found an answer. Within a Christia or post-Christian culture, it stands also for Man's primal innocence in Eden The desire to slip back behind the angel with a fiery sword is given a deepe poignancy and sense of guilt by an understanding also of the garden o Gethsemane, where Christ wrestled with human loneliness and overcame it It is an image that recurs in the poetry and plays of Eliot. In *Ash Wednesday* the poem which marks a turning-point in his development, he writes of th garden that can be rediscovered only by the confession that sin and folly hav lost it. In *Burnt Norton*, the country garden again sets the scene of childhoo innocence that can look forward without fear. Harry in *The Family Reunio* looks to the same refuge. In *The Confidential Clerk*, the garden is a dominan image when Colby and Lucasta discuss their private worlds that can so easil be shattered. It is impossible to admit anyone else to the garden, though sympathetic person may chance to slip inside and share the peace to be foun

there. But always there is the fear of intrusion from the alien world, which turns the garden to the Waste Land:

" Then the flowers would fade
And the music would stop. And the walls would be broken.
And you would find yourself in a devasted area—
A bomb-site—willow-herb—a dirty public square."

And this surely, this juxtaposition of the ideal and the actual, the traditional image and its existential appearances, this is precisely what is needed to-day.

One other traditional image may be cited—this time a dynamic one which communicates growth and becoming rather than retreat. The journey undertaken for a quest echoes down to us from the wanderings of Moses in the wilderness through the travels of St. Paul and the quest for the Holy Grail. Few images perhaps can bridge so effectively the space between fact and legend. And it appears again in modern religious drama. Harry in *The Family Reunion* and Celia in *The Cocktail Party* have to leave family and friends and set out on a journey before their salvation can be achieved.

" We know where she is going.
But what do we know of the perils of the journey?
You and I don't know the process by which the human is
Transhumanised: what do we know
Of the way of suffering they must undergo
On the way of illumination? "

So, too, some of Christopher Fry's principal characters take significant journeys. Cuthman, the hero of his early play *The Boy With a Cart*, sets out to search for the place where he must build his church. The Countess in *The Dark is Light Enough* makes her little excursion through the snow to rescue the wretched Gettner; and the language in which she speaks of it suggests that those few miles may cover a lifetime of purpose. They are indeed the approach to the Chapel Perilous, where the Holy Grail is at last to be found:

" I have been as clever as an ostler,
And driven alone, one human and two horses,
Into a redeemed land, uncrossed by any soul
Or sound, and always the falling perfection
Covering where we came, so that the land
Lay perfect behind us, as though we were perpetually
Forgiven the journey."

But what now of those realms of religious communication where the traditional imagery is inadequate? What, in fact, is to be done by the dramatist who, believing deeply in the validity of certain experiences within himself, finds that he cannot awaken similar experiences in others by straightforward language or the images through which his own mind works? The Bible gives him his myth; he must now try to set down its truths in language that will both spread those truths more widely and satisfy his own demands as an artist. The myth is often presented in a loosely-written narrative,

suggesting rather than stating in detail, and thus allowing a good deal o freedom of treatment without departure from orthodoxy. There are tw principal methods of approach.

First, the actual scene of the scriptures may be reset, adding what embellish ments the author's imagination suggests. There is scope here for a great dea of freedom of imagery, providing jarring anachronism is avoided. It is th method of *The Firstborn*, *The Man Born to be King* and, with non-biblica

STANLEY BAKER, DENHOLM ELLIOTT, HUGH PRYSE AND LEONARD WHITE IN "A SLEEP OF PRISONERS", BY CHRISTOPHER FRY

(*Houston Rogers*)

history, *Murder in the Cathedral*. In this last play, Eliot continually use imagery which is compatible with the supposed period but yet is modern i its communication. Consider Becket's long soliloquy:

> "Thirty years ago, I searched all the ways
> That lead to pleasure, advancement and praise.
> Delight in sense, in learning and in thought,
> Music and philosophy, curiosity,
> The purple bullfinch in the lilac tree,
> The tiltyard skill, the strategy of chess,
> Love in the garden, singing to the instrument,
> Were all things equally desirable."

Here there is no image of worldly pleasure that might not have suggested itself to the medieval archbishop, yet equally none that is meaningless to a modern audience. The attempt has been successfully made, which Shaw declared to be his aim in *Saint Joan*, of making the characters speak as they would have done had they been fully conscious of the further significance of what they were saying.

Even anachronism may be permissible if it arises as a natural expression of character and situation and is not thrown crudely across the historical background. Everybody knows how the authors of the medieval mysteries treated their sacred subjects with a familiarity that increases their sense of reverence. There is no more solemn and moving moment than when the shepherds of the Wakefield Nativity approach the infant Christ with compassion and gifts that are medieval and certainly not Palestinian:

> " Hail! sweet is thy cheer: my heart would bleed
> To see thee sit here in so poor weed,
> With no pennies.
> Hail! put forth thy dall, (hand)
> I bring thee but a ball—
> Have and play thee with all,
> And go to the tennis."

Similarly it may be both dramatically and doctrinally appropriate to convert biblical ideas into modern terms. The most successful effort has been Fry's *A Sleep of Prisoners* where, by the dream-device, the story can be enacted on two levels. Biblical events are presented by modern soldiers who speak in their own natural imagery.

Fry has, in this play, linked the first means of approach to biblical material with the second. Instead of presenting the old story in modern terms, it is possible to choose a situation and characters that are entirely modern in reference and to let the myth work out through them—the method of such plays as *The Cocktail Party*. This method clearly gives greater scope for new imagery to evoke the desired response, and in some ways presents a greater challenge to the writer. The greatest task of the Christian dramatist to-day does in fact seem to be the finding of enduring significance in apparent commonplaces. Whether he tries to find modern imagery to communicate past events, or projects old truths into a modern setting, his concern is to show the continuity of life under God's purpose. He must seek his referents in that which is most generally familiar to his diversified audience. If wisdom and comfort are now found by many people in applied psychology, a psychiatrist may well be the central figure in a new religious play—like the ambivalent Harcourt Reilly in *The Cocktail Party*. If images of war and military service communicate only too-strongly to successive generations, they may be put to good literary purpose.

On this use of existential imagery to express essential truths, the main problem of the modern religious dramatist may be said to turn. How far is it possible to depart from the traditional symbols without losing also the

truths which they express? Must the deposit of faith be enshrined for ever in those linguistic forms through which it was first communicated?

It is vitally important here to distinguish between that which is historically factual but has been given wider symbolic significance and that which is merely a convenient way of expressing the abstract. It makes nonsense of two thousand years of Christianity to say that the Cross was "only a symbol". If the narrative of the Passion is only the imaginative method chosen by the evangelists to show that human sin defies God's love and leads to innocent suffering, Christianity becomes no more than a set of ethical precepts with a vaguely theistic background. The Cross, most powerful indeed of all Christian symbols, is also a real wooden gallows on a Judaean hill where the fact of divine intervention in human time reached its consummation. Similarly, the Resurrection is not a symbol of possible human immortality in the memory of good deeds. It relates to a visible body that spoke and walked and ate for forty days after the first death, forty days that changed men's understanding of their relationship with God. One of the greatest dangers to pure Christian faith to-day lies in well-meaning attempts to widen its appeal by making poetic fiction out of the records of hot, weary days in Palestine long ago.

Yet there are other aspects of the Bible, and of Christian tradition, which do not depend for their value on the actual events related. Stories, which may also be literally true, are yet regarded more highly for the truth for which they stand. The great archetypes of the religious encounter can take many forms. There are beliefs that lie deep in human consciousness and must be newly evoked in every age. The images used for this evocation are to be judged by their efficiency and validity rather than for any inherent quality of their own. For instance, the element of conflict and struggle in human life is felt in all ages. The Christian conceives of powerful forces warring for his soul; but the sense of battle is not limited to the holders of any particular commitment. Even the atheist is aware of tensions in his nature, which he may try to rationalise but cannot ignore. St. Paul describes the Christian's preparation as an arming for battle, in detailed terms of the equipment of a Roman soldier. A modern dramatist will appeal rather to the familiar experiences of his generation, using images drawn from a very different kind of military life. He may be able to restate biblical stories in this way, without losing any of their essential teaching. It must here be stressed once again that there is a great difference between using images of a modern military campaign to tell the story of Cain and Abel, or David and Absalom, and saying that the account of the Passion is just one imaginative way of expressing God's love to Man. The accidents can be changed as occasion demands: the essentials must remain as long as the story endures. The essential of the story of the primal murder is that Cain kills Abel in jealous anger; it matters not whether he is shown as striking him with a stone or shooting him down with a sten-gun.

And indeed this mode of sanctifying the images of violence by associating them with a sacred context is potent in modern religious drama. The tension,

so familiar in our time, between the life-force and the death-wish, is often presented and resolved in the Christian regard of death as the gateway of new life. The theme of *A Sleep of Prisoners* is the gradual escape from violence as the motive for the evil deed of killing grows purer, until at last all the characters find release through their total involvement in the human situation. In earlier plays too, Fry uses imagery drawn from this same tension, even in work not specifically treating of a religious theme. In the delightful short play *A Phoenix too Frequent*, the heroine, Dynamene, hesitates between death for her husband's memory and life with her new lover:

> " When the thoughts would die, the instincts will set sail
> For life. And when the thoughts are alert for life
> The instincts will rage to be destroyed on the rocks."

Here, as in the words of Eliot's Becket quoted earlier, there is imagery that is at once perfectly in character and yet of universal application. The same may be said of the words of Mendip, the war-weary soldier in *The Lady's Not for Burning:*

> " I've been unidentifiably
> Floundering in Flanders for the past seven years,
> Prising open ribs to let men go
> On the indefinite leave which needs no pass.
> And now all roads are uncommonly flat, and all hair
> Stands on end."

Perhaps the solution will be found not so much in the choice of images with material referents, but rather in the choice of general abstract states of the human condition, which can then be expressed in imagery appropriate to the dramatic structure. One may think of the discussions of the problem of loneliness which appear in many modern religious and near-religious plays, summed up perhaps in Fry's Duke of Altair:

> " The note, my son, is loneliness.
> Over all the world
> Men move unhoming and eternally
> Concerned: a swarm of bees who have lost their queen."

Or again, it is possible to take the Christian concept of Sacrifice and express it in new imagery. Sacrifice evolves its meaning through the Old and New Testaments, and there is room for yet further presentations. The great national sufferings of the present century may furnish much imagery for this concept. Thereby the old theme is made newly meaningful and the images of horror take on a new rôle.

For dramatic imagery, if it is strong and honest, blesses the dramatist and his audience in two ways. An image is valid if it communicates, within the dramatic situation, an idea which cannot be otherwise expressed. At the same time, commonplaces of life acquire dignity and magic as their symbolic significance is developed. Religious worship at all times has made use of

those referents which are felt to be fitting to express some aspect of the divine. Yet all images, however beautiful or appropriate, are ultimately inadequate. The Christian dramatist must always be reminding himself, about any imagery he uses, of the antithesis—" This also is Thou: neither is this Thou." Or in the words of that great poet and mystic of our time, Charles Williams:

> " Let the chief of the images touch the Unimaged, and free
> The love that recovered Itself, nor only an image,
> Nor only all the images, but wholly Itself."

CORRESPONDENCE

The Portrayal of Christ in Drama

DEAR SIR,

There are many of us, I am sure, who will be grateful to you for having raised once more a question of immense concern to all who have the future of religious drama in this country at heart.

Let me say at once that I for one heartily endorse the view that stage portrayals of Christ outside church ought *not* to be banned. My reason is that the Christian dramatist is being severely hampered in his work if he cannot show his central character in action. In no other sphere of drama does such an obstacle exist. Why should religious drama be hamstrung in this way?

It has been argued that there is the danger of irreverence. I do not agree. The ultimate arbiters of good taste in any age are the public who make up our theatre audiences. Whatever the non-churchgoer may or may not believe about the Person of Christ, there can be no doubt about the esteem in which His character as revealed in the New Testament is held: this in itself is a safeguard against blasphemy, if such were needed.

It has also been argued that some sort of control by the Church over religious plays is necessary. Why, in heaven's name? You cannot tie a dramatist down to a set of rules, any more than you can a painter. Whether his play is produced in or out of church, it must be judged on its merits as a play.

In fact, as matters stand to-day, the Lord Chamberlain's ban makes it wellnigh impossible for the Christian dramatist to obey his Lord's command to go out into all the world and preach the Gospel.

Yours very truly,

9 Farnan Road, Streatham, London, S.W. 16. JOHN P. BARTON.
April 6th, 1958.

DEAR MR. EDITOR,

In reply to your request for observations on the question of portraying the Person of Christ, I venture to send the following comments as a result of my experience at St. Mary's, Nottingham—which I have just left.

On three occasions St. Mary's Players gave a performance of a Passion Play in Mime with the Christus performed by an actor.

For a long time I had been—and still am—very dissatisfied with the conventional Passion Play and believe that the story of Our Lord's Passion in the words of Scripture cannot be improved upon. We therefore decided to produce a Passion Play of our own in the words of the Gospels, giving the sequence of the principal events from the Entry into Jerusalem to the Resurrection, spoken by a Reader and mimed by the Players.

It was possible to portray the Crucifixion without I believe causing " offence ", by having the Christus led from the main stage in front of the Choir Screen through the Choir to a second stage in front of the Communion rails, where the incident was shown in silhouette. In the Resurrection Scenes, the Christus came no further forward again than the entrance to the Choir Screen. I received permission from the Bishop of the Diocese to impersonate the Christus and in each obtained a priest of another parish. Not only the Christus but the whole cast were strictly anonymous.

I received only two objections—one, on the ground of " reverence " that it is improper for anyone to take the part of Our Lord; the other that " it made it all too real ". On the other hand each of the priests emphasised how deeply he had valued the privilege of taking the part of the Christus.

In addition to these we produced on two occasions, but on a very much smaller scale, a Devotional Mime based on " The Instruments of the Passion " (as a Service for Good Friday evening). In this case as the whole production was of a more simple and " intimate " character, and the congregation rather nearer to the stage, the Christus had his back to the congregation almost throughout, and the Crucifixion was " seen from behind " by the congregation. To sum up:

1. I believe that the majority of people have no difficulty about the Person of Christ being portrayed—in fact our Passion Play was more " appreciated " than our Nativity Play.

2. I believe that a great deal of the difficulty in this whole question is got over if (*a*) one sticks to the words of Scripture; (*b*) the Story is read by a Reader; (*c*) i.e., the Christus does not speak—and is incognito.

3. I would suggest, in fact, that Mime provides the " safest " medium, fewer possibilities of jarring and more opportunities of " getting it across ".

4. The whole question and the script should be submitted beforehand to the Bishop and receive his sanction.

Yours sincerely,

4 The Cloisters, Windsor Castle. R. H. HAWKINS.
April 9th, 1958.

DEAR SIR,

In answer to your request for members' opinions on the representation of the Person of Christ on our stages, mine run something like this: I agree with the viewpoints of the Editorial, and find nothing intrinsically wrong in such representation.

What does frighten me is the attitude sometimes encountered in discussions of this, which seems to imply that only the Lord Chamberlain's ban on this representation lies between us and complete communication, and that once we get the ban lifted and can " show them the Christ ", all our worries will be over.

It isn't and they won't.

The lifting of that ban is going to provide us with a whole series of problems *over and above the obvious ones of (humanly speaking) adequate representation.* Naturally we want no more mawkish figures with feeble hands, wearing an effeminate and ill-fitting wavy auburn wig (such as I saw—endured would be the fitter word—in a suburban church some years ago: had the Bishop O.K.'d *that*?). No, we shall put our utmost thought and care and prayer into the worthiest Representation possible—and after that, what?

The very people upon whom the " shared experience ", in theatrical (i.e., not Church) terms, of the represented human life of our Lord will make the greatest impact are the very ones who will feel most desolate when the dramatic illusion ends, the stage lights dim, and they find themselves outside at a rainy bus-stop, facing a life of coming to terms with an *unseen* Christ. Our biggest problem will still be what it is now: to walk *their* Damascus Road; to share with them the experience of " seeing Him who is invisible ".

The thirty-odd years of the Incarnate Life of Jesus were preceded by centuries of preparation; follow-up operations have been under the personal supervision of the Holy Spirit for nearly twenty centuries more. Would anyone suggest that all worries are at an end?

This is not an argument against representing the Person of Christ when the ban is lifted, but a plea for realistic thinking and long-term planning. The showing forth of the Incarnate Lord is a *beginning*, not an end. There will be a terrible tendency to remain in a pre-Crucifixion stage of development. The Disciples experienced it—we all experience it: " O that we were there " . . . spiritual nostalgia. " I should like to have been with them then " is beautiful and right for the Sunday School child and the child in spiritual growth: to remain there may indicate arrested development. We live in the post-Pentecostal age.

The ban will be lifted in God's good time, not when we have agitated enough but when we are truly ready—with our follow-up as well as with the Representation itself. This includes not only our own dramatic programme but our co-operation with *every other agency* which shares responsibility for those lost souls in the rain at the bus stop: it all links with Dr. Bell's magnificent lead given at Convocation. While we plan for the worthy dramatic illusion, let us remember, and plan even more strongly for, the inevitable dis-illusion.

Sincerely yours,

JESSIE POWELL.

London, E. 11.

April 14th, 1958.

EVANGELISM and DOROTHY L. SAYERS

A Comment and a Reply

An obituary on the late Dorothy L. Sayers was published in the Spring umber of *Christian Drama*. The Rev. Philip Turner, author of *Christ in he Concrete City* wrote to the Editor on the subject:

Dear Sir,

" Ma Virgilio n'avea lasciati scemi di se . . ."

May I beg space in your pages to thank Father McLaughlin for his moving bituary notice on Miss Dorothy L. Sayers, and to ask him a question?

He writes: " Evangelism as popularly understood was in her view one of ne biggest impediments to conversion in the world of to-day."

It has always seemed to me that Miss Sayers was one of the very few who, n this matter of communication, could " unbar the gates of Dis ". Therefore s one who cares very much about evangelism, I should be grateful for rther elucidation of the phrase " evangelism as popularly understood ". s this a stricture of method, of content, of language, or of all three? Does it mbrace Billy Graham at Harringay, a Franciscan Hopping Mission, and ne struggling to put the Atonement into words of one syllable for a young ouple in a New Town flat?

I realise that an obituary notice is not a treatise on evangelism, but the ubject is so important, and Miss Sayers' views of such authority, that I should e very glad if Father McLaughlin could expand his remark.

Yours faithfully,

P. W. Turner.

he Rev. Patrick McLaughlin has replied:

Evangelism is now such a portmanteau word that perhaps " as popularly nderstood " it has no precise connotation. To me, however (and, as I recall, o Miss Sayers) the word connoted attempts, well-meaning but all too often nept, to expound the Gospel story and explain the Christian faith to people nfamiliar with it *in the language of the Bible or the idiom of the Creeds*. But nis is usually to offer such people answers to questions they have not yet sked and (worse) to suggest to them that the Gospel story is just one among nany other legends, or that the Christian faith is one among many optional hilosophies. This suggestion is all too commonly confirmed by the unortunate phrase " the Church's contribution to . . .". The vice of such hrases, or of such efforts, is that they obscure the basic fact that the Christian ith is not an optional philosophy but the criterion of all philosophies, the ue to the riddle of the universe. The Creeds are not catalogues of propositions, but delicate essays in counterpoint whose significance lies in the alance and inter-relation of the statements they contain. In this they esemble not so much a confession as a string quartet, or perhaps a quadratic quation. Miss Sayers used to point to the " Divine Comedy ", or any other reat poem, as an image of the Creeds and so of the Faith. Her stricture pon " evangelism as popularly understood " was first, that it treated the

Faith like prose rather than poetry (and commercial prose at that); secondly that it refused to take the trouble to learn the language, idiom and thought-forms of the people addressed, requiring them instead to learn the Church's more archaic speech (a stricture which, she observed, was frequently made also upon British salesmanship in foreign markets where it was viewed as a more serious fault); thirdly, because it treated the Faith, or even the Christian religion, as a thing in itself, not as the clue to everything else. The example of a quadratic equation was her favourite, because this showed how the Christian Faith is essentially an algebra whose arithmetical equivalents may vary in different times and places, but whose importance lies in sustaining the equation; i.e., the Creeds are better regarded as algebra than as arithmetic.

This point may be illustrated in another way by reference to Ephesians iv. 11; here the Apostle lays down an order of functions (which he ascribes to Almighty God, which is certainly both logical and confirmed by experience) where the first move is made by the apostle (with the initial in lower case) who simply IS in a place as the Lord's representative, without necessarily saying so; he is followed by the prophet, whose office is to talk with his neighbour of all the current affairs of their world in the light of his faith, but without disclosing the source of this light until his listeners' curiosity and admiration of his superior wisdom is excited. Then, but only then, is the time to reveal the premises or presuppositions of the Faith, i.e. to tell the Gospel story and explain the Faith. Evangelism in Miss Sayers' view was " one of the biggest impediments to conversion to-day " mainly because it did not leave time for the apostle and prophet to prepare the soil. She was much less bothered by the vulgarity of popular missions or missioners. Indeed, as a craftsman she appreciated their serious efforts to find a language for conveying their message to their hearers. Her stricture was rather upon the whole assumption that the Faith or religion was a thing in itself out of relation with the world in which people live, or only one subject amongst others; her own ambition and desire was always to show the Faith (to use yet another of her images) not as the tyre which would soften one's journey through life on wheels whose bare rims might otherwise jar us, but as the hub or axle upon which the wheel of the whole of life turned.

APPEAL FROM SWEDEN

A Swedish Pastor would like to visit England with his Church Drama Group during the summer of 1959, the group consisting of about ten to fifteen boys and girls aged 16–18 years. Having very little money, they would like to produce one or two small plays. Last year they visited Germany and although they performed in Swedish, German texts were provided for the audience and Bible readings were done in German. Is there any drama group in this country which would act as host to these young Swedish Christians, with an open invitation to pay a return visit to Sweden in the following year? If so, please communicate with the Rev. Goran Granberg, Svartivik, Sweden

AUDIENCE ON TRIAL

Man on Trial, by Diego Fabbri, produced by the Civil Service Theatre Guild.

The Civil Service Theatre Guild's production of *Man on Trial* (only its second amateur showing, though a professional production is now playing to packed audiences in Paris) was a tremendously exciting experience. It is only on looking back that one begins to wonder what the excitement was really about, and how much of permanent value remains when the tumult and the shouting dies. Initially, however, it provided the kind of stimulus that keeps members of the audience up until the small hours, arguing furiously. Its genuinely Italian vehemence and intensity communicate; and this is strengthened by the lavish use of characters " planted " in the audience. The second part in particular is punctuated by passionate interruptions, counter-interruptions, heckling, and oratory from the floor of the house, so that the nerve-racked spectators, caught in the ideological crossfire, become either entirely demoralised or seized with a violent desire to join in. The interruptions are so naturally written and well-timed, that one cannot always be sure whether they are in fact scripted, or whether some member of the public has been completely carried away (indeed I feel pretty sure that one interrupter was *not* in the script, on the night I saw the play).

At the time, there seemed no reason why anyone in the hall should *not* rise up and express his views to the characters on the stage, oblivious of their fictional nature. " Audience participation " could scarcely go further!

(*Continued overleaf*).

Book this Date in your Diary

1st November, 1958

AND COME TO THE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Full details later

FOR CHRISTMAS

LET 'S PREPARE A NATIVITY PLAY by Freda Collins. Illustrated, 7s. 11d.

THE ANGELS AT BETHLEHEM by Freda Collins 2s. 4d.

CHRISTMAS IN THE MARKET PLACE by Henri Ghéon, adapted by Eric Crozier. Televised. 5s. 4d.

DARK NOEL by L. E. Thomas. 2s. 10d.

FIT FOR A KING by Barbara Willard. 2s. 10d.

THE HOPEFUL TRAVELLERS by G. M. Martens, adapted by André Obey and translated by Iris Capell. 5s. 4d.

THE JOURNEY OF THE THREE KINGS by Henri Ghéon, translated by C. C. Martindale. 3s. 10d.

THE LIGHT IN DARKNESS by T. B. Morris. 3s. 4d.

NO ROOM by Freda Collins and Alison Graham-Campbell. 2s. 4d.

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN by Clive Sansom. 5s. 4d.

For details write for our FREE LISTS OF RELIGIOUS PLAYS

Prices include postage. Plays on appro. 4d. each

J. GARNET MILLER LTD.

54 Victoria Street, London, S.W. 1 (TATe Gallery 1781)

(*Continued from previous page*).

We are introduced to an elderly European Jew of to-day, and his wife Rebecca. This gentle pair escaped the Nazi gas chambers, but they are haunted by the traditional reproach cast at Israel by the Western world, the murder of Christ. " His blood be upon us and on our children." Since the end of the war they have toured Europe, with their daughter Sarah (whose husband died in Germany), her lover David, and a handful of hired actors. Over and over again they have staged a free discussion play which tries to reach an unanimous verdict on the question, " Was the trial of Jesus a just one according to Jewish law? " But nothing new has emerged, the ghost of guilt is still un-laid, and for their different reasons all four are near to breaking point.

The opening scenes show the discussion play in action. Advocates are chosen by ballot, and the cross questioning of Pilate, Caiaphas and the rest begins. For some little time, we are led to believe that Signor Fabbri has only found a new framework for the familiar " trial scene " about the Easter story (as in *The Vigil* and *What is Your Verdict?*).

Then Sarah can go on no longer. She stops the players, and demands a change of plan. Perhaps they never find answers because they are not asking the right questions. Christ was condemned as a false Messiah. If this is true the sentence was a fair one; but was He false? *Who and what was Jesus of Nazareth?*

New witnesses must be called: Mary and Joseph, Peter and John and Judas. Members of the company are hastily selected, and improvise the evidence they feel their new characters would have given. Judas in particular arouses strong feelings, especially in David, who is driven more and more into opposition. One is made to sense that something in the personal lives of the four protagonists is still hidden, and that this departure from the beaten track of their routine has set new and explosive forces in motion.

The new forces have their effect also on the audience. The discussion on stage is reinforced from the house; first by an atheist and a priest, who skirmish over the claims of the Church, and represent the theorists who will never come to an agreement; then by a street-girl and an outcast young man, the publicans and sinners, who testify to their need for Christ their only hope. Lastly a charwoman from back-stage intervenes, and she stands for simple uncomplicated faith. The answer to the question, *who is He?*, is to be found not in discussion after all, but in personal experience of the living Christ. On these grounds the verdict on Him must be " not guilty ".

By now the machinery of the rehearsed play has broken down. David, faced with an unbearable verdict, is driven to confess the truth at last in front of the whole assembled company. He was the man who betrayed Sarah's husband to his death. It is the likeness of this act to the betrayal of Christ that has obsessed him with fear and hatred of His claims.

The play closes on a note of hope. The truth is out at last. In the open it will lose its poison for the family; and if betrayal leads to a Passion, there is still the Resurrection and new life to come.

It will at once be seen that this attempt at a summary of the action is nadequate. In fact it is impossible to summarise, not because little of mportance is said or done, but because far too much is said. Rough material 'or six or seven plays arguing the Christian case has been packed recklessly nto two hours' playing time. There seems to be no single climax to which he whole play drives, and so no single clear message to take away from the heatre. David's confession presumably should be the turning point. By he time we reach it however it comes almost as an anticlimax. Our attention nas been too long and too closely held elsewhere, and in any case it comes as 10 real surprise. The human problem in the play has immense implications, ind it is a pity they could not have been given more room to develop.

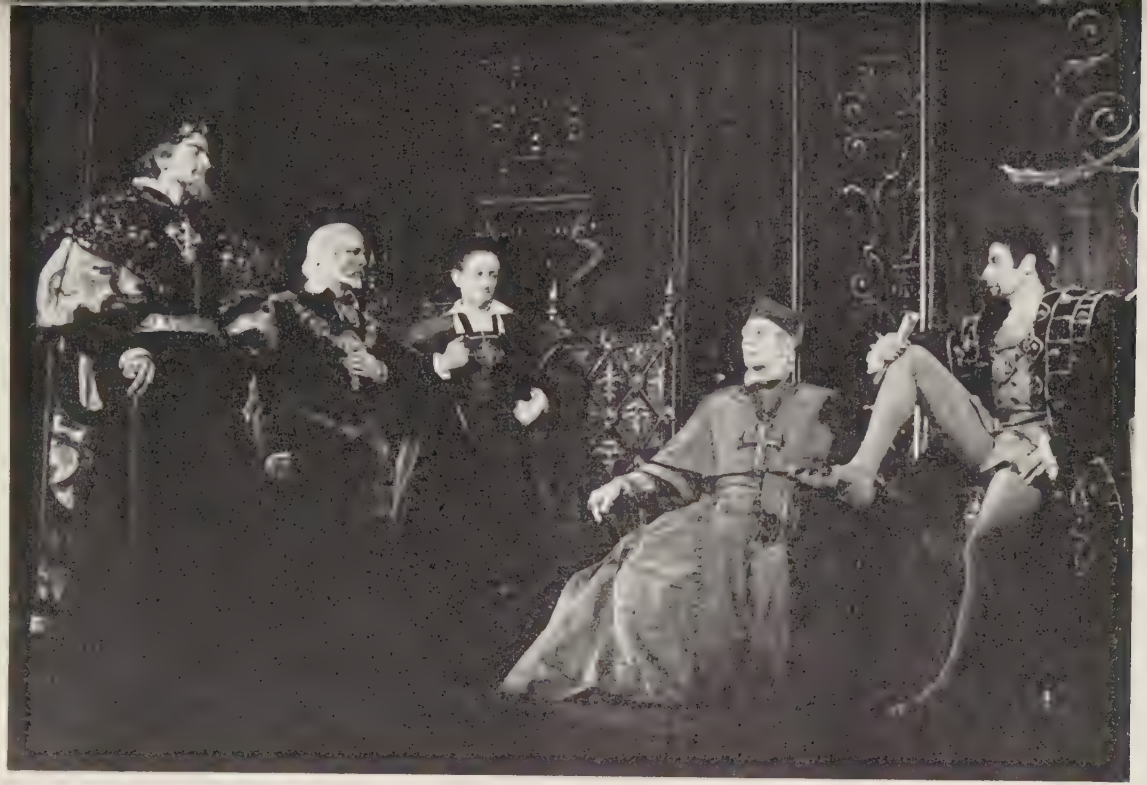
The playwright uses a formidable technical apparatus, and the production of such a complex play would tax any company. The Civil Service Theatre Guild must be congratulated on the way in which they rose to its demands, nd never once let the tension slip, though the weakness of only one player would have lost the audience's attention disastrously. It was indeed an xciting evening—but I wish I had had the courage to get up and walk into he play!

CAPELLA.

LONDON THEATRE

By JOHN HESTER

Volumes have been written and words talked enough to last till the end o time on the subject of theatrical experience, its strange power and its constar surprises. No two better examples could be given than those provided b two widely differing works during the last few months, Mr. Wolf Mankowitz' musical play *Expresso Bongo* (Saville Theatre, April 23rd) and Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata* (Duke of York's, February 18th, after a season at th Royal Court). Both these works are deadly serious in intention, thoug hiding their importance behind almost frivolous facades. *Expresso Bong* has blaring trumpets, pop music and rock 'n roll, yet I can remember fe occasions when I have been more personally and directly challenged than o the night I saw it. I felt a distress for humanity which faced up boldly to m faith and tried to tempt it into the depths of despair. The play is not only a indictment of the nonsense features of modern youth; it is an exposition o the human dilemma at all levels, biting equally at the environment in whic our young people are forced to grow, but telling also of the tragedy of un loved old age. It is serious and profound to a degree which one's superficia habit of theatre-going found almost unbearable, the power of the medieva moralities transposed into a modern idiom. (We even have a visual suggestio of the jaws of hell itself, blaring red, in the scene at the Deep South Jazz Club Miss Hy Hazell's song called " Time " is unforgettable; so are " The Shrin on the Second Floor ", " Nothing is for Nothing " and the hair-raisin " There's Nothing Wrong with British Youth To-day ". The cast is heade by the distinguished Christian actor, Mr. Paul Scofield, with talented co laboration from Mr. William Chappell as director and Mr. Loudon Sainthi as designer. After seeing it one is an older and wiser person. And so also wa one after the English Stage Company's superb production of the *Lysistrat* The threat of nuclear warfare which hangs over the world of Bongo Herbe is little different in quality from the actual, desperate fact of war with Spart dominating the characters in Aristophanes' comedy. This work was writte in urgent protest against the folly and wastage of war some four centuri before the Prince of Peace was born. It is a deliberate attempt to influence th course of public events for good, and should therefore be received by Christia playgoers with gratitude. It is indeed immensely difficult to translate ou selves into a world in which the Incarnation was still far distant in the futu and our western manners and proprieties unthought of: Mr. Minos Volanaki production only attempted so to translate us in certain respects. The sets b Mr. Nicholas Georgiadis were modern in colour and feeling, as also was th central performance of Miss Joan Greenwood, while Mr. Thomas Eastwood music on the other hand uses we are told authentic melodies and forms the period, and the play ends with a ritual dance reminding us of the liturgic quality of classical drama. The story is simple—an alliance of the women both sides to make a peace which their men have for twenty years prove



SIR JOHN GIELGUD AS THE FALLEN CARDINAL WOLSEY IN SHAKESPEARE'S "KING HENRY VIII", WITH RICHARD WORDSWORTH, PAUL DANEMAN, DANIEL THORNDIKE AND JOHN HUMPHRY

(*by permission of the Old Vic Theatre*) (*Angus McBean*)

themselves incapable of achieving. The drastic weapon they use is the mo powerful in their armoury—the refusal of marital rights to their husbands t peace has been secured. This is indeed unsubtle blackmail but is used in th most creditable of causes! The production was delicious, radiating outwar from Miss Greenwood herself, her extraordinary voice thrilling visibly dow her lovely arms to the tips of her fingers. Who else could bring a contente chuckle from an audience by the rendering of such a prosaic phrase as " ro and tackle "?

But the pairing of plays is often more obvious than that of *Lysistrata* wit *Expresso Bongo*, such as for example Mr. Peter Coke's *Breath of Spring* an Mr. Robert Miller's *The Big Tickle* (Cambridge Theatre, March 26th an Duke of York's, May 23rd). Both are restatements of the Robin Hoo legend in modern dress, both are triumphs for actors of an older generatio and both present a certain problem to the religious playgoer. In the one pla Miss Athene Seyler leads what she herself calls her " merry women " in fu stealing escapades on behalf of charity, in the other it is Miss Yvonne Arnau and Mr. Jack Hulbert who lead the exploits. Both the plays are bright an gay (though Mr. Coke's sags rather badly in the middle), yet they conce one of the thorniest of moral problems—whether evil can ever be justifie in a " good " cause. Need we pursue the problem? Surely not! For we a in a land of delicious, easeful, inconsequent comedy, where laws are entire unto themselves, a land made for the delight of matinee audiences—and i the case of these plays the delight of all who look for accomplished timing an evident enjoyment in their actors.

Mention of Mr. Ronald Duncan's name moves us immediately into a ver different type of world, where moral values are all-important, where we kno the author has something vital to say to us if we will watch and listen carefull His latest play, *The Catalyst*, having been refused a licence by the Lo Chamberlain, was presented to club members at the Arts Theatre on Mar 25th. It may perhaps be classed as pre-religious drama, dealing with tho states of mind and soul into which the seeds of religion must fall if they are t have a chance of sturdy growth. There are three characters suggesting at fir only the tired triangle of husband, wife and secretary-*cum*-lover. But cros currents of longing disturb the conventional pattern; not only does the ma desire the love of both women at the same time, feminine wife and boyis secretary, and they in their turn both desire him, but the two women have longing for each other also. Mr. Duncan's handling of this situation superb. Through the action of his drama he shows how only by the recogn tion of the truth about ourselves and our neighbours can one hope for pea within oneself; within each of us is weakness and strength, good and ev and (a physiological fact most relevant here) an element of both the sexe Having come to terms with these truths there can be real hope. " It wo be lonely any more, there's someone I've just met, myself." And so the so is prepared for God's approach.

The impact of *The Catalyst* was seriously weakened in the last ten minut by the substitution of didactic for dramatic method. But what had go

before had been beautifully written in free poetic style, with memorable passages of both serious and comic dialogue. Witness the secretary's wistful reflection on the bliss she might have enjoyed had she been able to become a simple possession, a " thing " belonging to her lover; or the husband's delicious complaint that talking to his wife " is like knitting with a piece of elastic ". The play was directed by Mr. Phil Brown, who himself played the husband, supported brilliantly by Miss Renée Asherson and Miss Virginia Maskell. While the Lord Chamberlain's ban continues it will not be possible for this memorable play to be seen outside club premises, but it is to be hoped that as many as possible will read and re-read the text, and come to know it at second best that way.

It is interesting to compare Mr. Duncan's treatment of his theme with the handling of something comparable in *Twelfth Night*, where there is a glorious mix-up of the sexes with the wildest possibilities. But it was not Shakespeare's purpose to develop these. Olivia's love for the disguised Viola and Orsino's for his young page are displaced in our memories by the happy unions of Sebastian with Olivia and Orsino with the unmasked Viola. In Mr. Michael Benthall's Old Vic production (April 1st) the shadows were dissolved in pure delight (albeit an autumnal delight as presented by Mr. Desmond Heeley's lovely setting). Miss Barbara Jefford continued her enchanting series of male impersonations which has included her exquisite Imogen, her bitter-sweet dilemma as Viola being now thrown into vivid relief by the playing of the drunken knights by Mr. Paul Daneman and Mr. John Neville.

It was again Mr. Daneman as the Fool and Miss Jefford as Regan who emerged with most credit from Mr. Douglas Seale's production of *King Lear* at the same theatre on February 19th. The rest was almost unrelieved disappointment. One simply failed to care about the play's tremendous warning that in the emotional inferno which is life a single action of folly can release upon the soul such a deluge of unsuspected hardship. Nor would one easily recognise the same company when on May 13th they presented Shakespeare's last and most uneven play, *King Henry VIII*. Mr. Benthall as director had the several ace cards in his hand which are necessary to distract the onlooker's attention from the play's sad poverty of inspiration. Among these was the amiable topicality of the royal references to close a season which has been graced by a visit from Her present Majesty: another was the illustrious cast which had assembled for this last work of the five-year First Folio cycle. Sir John Gielgud was Wolsey, bitter, bleary-eyed, and blotchy, drawing from the audience first scorn then sympathy as the terrible day of reckoning overtook him. This sympathy was finally sealed by Mr. Derek Francis' moving delivery of Griffith's speech describing the Cardinal's death at Leicester. Dame Edith Evans played Katherine with great quiet and beauty, Mr. Harry Andrews the King with turbulent dissatisfaction. Certainly the Church, both reformed and unreformed, gets little comfort from the portraits of Cranmer and Wolsey; only Wolsey's contrition as he realises at last the truth about himself strike a religious note which we can commend.

Sir John Gielgud's earnest delivery of these lines brought once more to mind his epilogue speech in the recent Stratford production of *The Tempest* (*Christian Drama*—Spring 1958).

I wish in conclusion that I could say something nice about *Duel of Angels* (Apollo, April 24th) by M. Jean Giraudoux, translated by Mr. Christopher Fry. I am devoted to both these writers, but this new play I could not follow. The characters seem to belong to a lunatic world where the normal course of action and reaction has been suspended. Perhaps the number of words seemed more than it actually was, and a high proportion of these were concerned with what might be broadly termed religious matters—but it is throughout the inconsequent religion of the madhouse. The angel of light in the duel described was acted by Miss Claire Bloom in characteristic style; unfortunately the nineteenth-century Lucretia she portrays is insufferable, and seemed thoroughly to deserve the trouncing she received from the angel of darkness—played on this occasion by Miss Vivien Leigh, whose greatest misfortune in undertaking this rôle is perhaps something for which she cannot be held responsible, namely that she is not Madame Edwige Fenillère, who created the part in Paris. This may indeed be the key to the production's failure; maybe it lies in M. Jean-Louis Barrault's direction of a play in a language not his own. But only the ladies' dresses designed by the late Christian Dior, with the performances in two of them of Miss Pauline Jameson and Miss Freda Jackson, left a happy memory. Yet therein lies the fascination of the living theatre, which is never predictable. And which of us would have that changed?

Book this Date in your Diary

1st November, 1958

AND COME TO THE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Full details later

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

LAYS

andle in the Heavens. JAMES KIRKUP. (Typescript.) HX. 6 scenes. 7m., 5w., nuns, court ladies, attendants, etc., Chorus of Women.

The play commissioned by the Archbishop of York for the Company of the Way, ull.

A surprising amount of dramatic variety and interest has been drawn from the w facts known about St. Hilda, Abbess of Whitby. The play shows the arrival of e delegates for the Synod of Whitby, in A.D. 664: St. Wilfred of Ripon leading e Roman Church party, St. Hilda and St. Colman the Celtic Church party, and ng Oswy of Northumbria representing the secular power. The two traditions are ll contrasted in a kindly spirit, and with some humour (as in the Yorkshire igious' sturdy contempt for fancy Southern customs such as tonsuring).

Hilda herself must struggle with a perennial problem: should she fight for her n private conviction, if the decision goes against her, or put peace and goodwill the Church first?

Verse passages for a Chorus of Women of Whitby, watching their men's boats ght in a storm, provide "local colour" and bring out a parallel between the ysical conflict at sea and the spiritual conflict on land. (Fee: apply author.)

e Cross Road. J. B. LOGAN. (St. Andrew's Press, 2/6). H. 1 act. 4m., 2w. (Modern play based on the life of Dr. Bonhoeffer.) (Fee: apply St. Giles' Press, Edinburgh.)

e Fearless Heart. GEORGES BERNANOS; a translation of *Dialogues des Carmélites* by MICHAEL LEGAT. (Bodley Head, 10/6.) H. 5 parts. Large mixed cast and crowd.

A translation of a film script left by M. Bernanos at his death. The opera permed at Covent Garden last year was based on the French original. (See *Christian ama* for Spring, 1958).

t tells the story of the thirty-six Carmelite nuns who were guillotined at Compgne during the French Revolution. One of the sisters, Blanche de la Force, ered Carmel to escape her fear of the world, which has hag-ridden her from ldhood—only to find herself in the front line after all. She runs away at the ment of crisis, but at the last moment she finds the courage to join the others untarily on the scaffold.

arlier, we have seen the disturbingly "bad death" of the old Prioress, who felt herself specially responsible for Blanche. It is implied that the Prioress k Blanche's burden, dying in fear so that the younger woman could find serenity he end.

powerfully written and profound work.

For reading only: not yet released for production in English.)

First Easter Day. W. MAULEVERER. (Typescript.) HX. 2 acts (5 scenes). 9m., 5w., extras.

simple, pleasantly written prose Easter play. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

ein is Love. MARY DIXEY. (A. H. Stockwell, 7/6.) H. 3 acts. 4m., 5w.

A prose Easter play.) (Fee: apply publishers.)

for a Play. RICHARD TYDEMAN. (Hugh Quekett, 2/–.) H. 1 act. 4m., 4w.

n amateur drama group are rehearsing a morality play in verse for a Festival. as reached the "despairing" stage. The scenery will keep falling down; the are suddenly critical of the play; the Producer (also the author) racks his brains tears his hair. What is missing from his play?

flippant one-acter with a serious point. (Fee: £1/1/-.)

Outside the Stable. FREDA COLLINS. (Faith Press, 2/-.) HX. Variable cast.
A Nativity play in simple verse form, arranged for church production but adapta for halls. (Ready late summer.) (Fee: apply League of British Dramatists.)

Passion in Paradise Street. P. W. TURNER. (Typescript.) 1 act (about 20 mi 5m., 2 w.
A short evangelistic play for street or hall; written for the New Pilgrim Play and since performed as part of local Missions.
A travelling company of actors discuss putting on a religious play. They cho parts as a typical North Country family of factory workers, and try out a scene which the Vicar pays a call, with disastrous results. After further discussion, t re-play the Vicar's visit, as it would have been if the family had known real Christ faith. He comes to bring Christmas Communion to a happy (but not sugary) ho (Fee: apply R.D.S.)

The Plays of John Whiting. (Heinemann, 21/-.) Comprising: **Saints' Day; Penny for a Song; Marching Song.**

The Road to Emmaus. JAMES FORSYTH. (Heinemann, 4/-.) H. 3 acts. 15m., 6 extras.
An Easter play in simple, vivid free verse, tracing the story from the garden of Sepulchre, to the Inn at Emmaus.
A group of disciples, men and women, reach Emmaus as a stopping place betw Jerusalem and the coast, where they hope to escape back to Galilee by sea. Am them are Cleopas and his wife, who meet the risen Christ.
Two carpenters, who have heard rumours of the Resurrection and hope to ear reward for Christ's re-capture, are introduced as a sub-plot.
In the published version of Act III, our Lord is not represented. An auth note states that he will supply the alternative version if preferred. (Fee: ap publishers.)

St. Kentigern's Miracle. A. A. BAKER. (St. Andrew Press, 2/6). H. 1 act. 5m boys.
How St. Kentigern won bread for the poor from the King of Strathclyde. (F apply publishers.)

Saints in Sussex. SHEILA KAYE-SMITH. (Cassell.) Publ. 1926. Including: **Child born at the Plough; The Shepherd of Lattenden.**
A Nativity play and Passion play set in rural Sussex; dialogue and songs dialect. (Reading only.)
(*Presented by Mr. E. Martin Browne.*)

Simple Bible Plays and How to Make Them. FREDA COLLINS. (Mowbray, 2/-.)
Replacing the same author's *Making Bible Plays for Little Ones*, now out of pr Advice on play-making with children, and specimen texts: part 1 is for the se to ten age group, part 2 for the ten to twelve age group. (Ready shortly.)

Sources of Information. D. J. COCK. (Methodist Youth Dept., 1/-.) H. 1 (20 mins. approx.). 2m., 2w.
A successful Lancashire business man, inconsiderate to his wife and intoler of his son's desire to be a medical missionary, is visited by "Mr. Gabrie apparently a reporter, who leads him to a change of heart.
A neat one-act play, simple to stage and act. (Fee: 5/-.)

REFERENCE BOOKS

The Cathedral. CLIVE SANSOM. (Methuen, 10/6.)
A sequence of poems, some dramatic monologues, illustrating the life of a gr Cathedral through the ages.

SPECIAL NOTES

Endgame. SAMUEL BECKETT. (Faber & Faber, 10/6.)

This is a strange and profound play translated by the author from the original French and produced at the Royal Court Theatre in 1957 under the title *Fin de Partie*. It is as abstract in expression as some of our more obscure contemporary paintings, and as easily misunderstood. How can four characters, a blind old man, his companion, and his mother and father immobile because legless in two dustbins, make a reasonable play? This question may well be asked. But Mr. Beckett is writing in a realm of thought outside the recognised forms of reason or reality, his is an exceptional mind-world deeply reflecting hidden facets of experience in a formula quite as exciting as a painting of a modern Christ in suffering, broken into planes of obscure light and angled patterns.

In *Endgame* Beckett has realised a drama of mankind in the last suffering, he has reduced his characters to a hell-hole of finality and despair. Godless, it is the desperately tragic end of a disillusioned mankind sensing an inevitable evolution of " something taking its course " and crying " It all happened without me . . .", " The earth is extinguished though I never saw it lit." He missed the boat and is left on the shore forgotten. Those who have crossed with direct eyes have gone leaving in their comfortless hole to dwindle out into final darkness " the hollow men the stuffed men ". But stuffed men retaining a pathetic, endearing and humorous dignity to the end.

Oh yes, it is despair all right, the terrible despair of disillusioned faith, a prevalent sensation in the world to-day, a dangerous and negative force. Yet all this Beckett reflects in his play with a compassion for his crumbled world in terms at once as poetic, humorous and intensely dramatic as to make it fascinatingly readable and re-readable. But to read is not enough; for full impact it needs the three dimensions of the theatre: it must be *seen*. A study of this play is rewarding, it provokes controversy. But Beckett can never be dismissed—he is an artist of the theatre, a powerful contemporary playwright.

The short mime play *Act Without Words* included in this volume is a comic comment on Man versus contrary gifts from Above. Perhaps T. S. Eliot's words are apt:

> " She gives when our attention is distracted,
> And what she gives, gives with such supple confusion
> That the giving famishes the craving."

ANNE FORD.

Bernadette. NOEL WOOLF and SHEILA BUCKLEY. (Samuel French.) H. 3 acts. 4m., 10w.

One hundred years ago, little Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes experienced the astonishing encounters which have turned a sleepy little provincial town into a great pilgrimage centre which counts its annual visitors by the million. This play, based on an original work by Martin Adeson, presents the saint to us at three critical points in her life—at her homecoming after the first meeting with her Lady, under pressure from representatives of both church and state at the time of the first miraculous healing, and in the convent at Nevers at the end of her short life.

Alas we get no clear characterisation either of the saint or of those who surrounded her. The dialogue even of the poor simple folk is suburban. Only the incredulous nun, Mother Marie-Thérèse, emerges in her full dimensions, and this tends to throw the play off what one must presume is the authors' intention in this centenary year. There is moreover further countering of this intention in a well-written speech by the Mayor of Lourdes who enjoys a fleeting vision of the prosperity which could come upon his town (and indeed has done so) if the little Soubirous girl were really a saint.

The last act contains several curiosities of detail. Would nuns continue to talk while the Angelus was ringing, and would a Reverend Mother nurtured in the traditions of Western Christendom comfort a daughter bereaved of her mother by asserting: " You can still pray for each other "? In the West is this not taken as something which is at the least unproven?

Yet the challenge of Lourdes emerges as sharply as ever from certain passages of the play, with the continuing enigma of the Lady's statement delivered in the local patois: " Que soy l'Immaculade Counceptiou." For many the subsequent history of the shrine will have answered the question. For many more it will still remain.

(To be released for amateurs, October 1st, 1958.) J. H.

FAR AND WIDE

Reports and Reviews of Christian Drama Activities in Great Britain and Overseas

Brisbane, Queensland

Murder in the Cathedral, Twelfth Night Theatre.

It is proof of this play's excellence that we can see it many times and still find pleasure and excitement in it. One reason may be that, although formal and even ritualistic, it lends itself to a variety of treatments and is adaptable to almost any conditions. Ideally, of course, it is a church play. It was designed for a church; its reality is increased by performance there; the horror of the murder is intensified; and the sermon and the music fit naturally into such a setting. And yet this production, in a little theatre seating about 150, is the most satisfying I have seen.

Why is this? First, I think because the producer had really grasped the spiritual meaning of the play, and directed everything towards its expression. She did not concentrate on details so that the audience received a brilliant interpretation of parts. We were aware of a genuine total experience. This is not to say that she had no new ideas. Using a two-level open stage, she had Becket and the First Tempter playing chess within a yard of the front spectators. But the game was an integral part of the temptation, each move emphasizing a point in the argument.

Even more daring was her treatment of the fourth temptation, where Becket listened to a tape-recording of his own voice. Mr. Eliot might complain with Olivia: "You are now out of your text," but if he had been present I believe he would have accepted it. For the tape-recording was not just a gimmick, as they say; it was an attempt to show us this last temptation as being the most dangerous because it was a struggle between two sides of Becket's present self. Technically, too, it was supremely well done, with a perfect synchronisation of voices. But as I said, one was hardly aware of these innovations while they were happening: they were so part of the complete pattern. They served a common purpose and were not an end in themselves.

This sense of purpose succeeded in other respects too. The Becket, for example, though he showed a very deep understanding of the significance of his part, lacked physical power to suggest the once worldly politician and administrator! but the overall strength of the production carried him through and made one realise that even in this play in which one character appears to dominate, team-work is more important than a "star" flashing in an imperfect sky!

He was particularly helped by the Chorus—so often a weak spot. The members were all trained in the speaking of verse; they gave their lines the variety and flexibility they needed, instead of sounding like a lot of people being depressed together. These Women of Canterbury were acceptable as real women, inspired by tragic happenings into an insight beyond their own, but representing the normality which underlies historical events. And technically (although their grouping might have been more varied) they bound together the different parts of the play that, without an efficient chorus, can seem rather "bitty".

CLIVE SANSOM.

* * *

Bickley, Kent

The Prototype, by Stuart Jackman.

Three performances of this play were presented by the Bickley and Widmore Guild of Players during Holy Week.

The play deals with the death and resurrection of Lazarus and the effect of these events on his sisters Martha and Mary. The author has written a play of considerable force and poignancy which loses nothing by the dramatic liberties that have been taken with scriptural accuracy.

The play was intended to be performed in church, and one of the Guild's performances was presented in the

Church of St. Paul, Beckenham, the others being given on the stage. *The Prototype* is perhaps not the most rewarding of the plays chosen for performance by the Guild; nevertheless, its production can only have enhanced the reputation of this sincere and enthusiastic group.

J. S.

* * *

Calne, Wilts.

One of the great virtues of the Calne Church Players is their amateurism in the best sense of the word, which is not to say that they are amateurish, though naturally they have their shortcomings. They are obviously a company of Christian people putting their sincere best into their work for the glory of God and for the edification of the Church.

Having seen last year the Players' most moving, simple and dignified production of the York Nativity I was expecting a worthy performance of Masefield's *Good Friday* and I was not disappointed. The play itself has its occasional faults, usually through those unnecessary attempts to embroider the simple narrative of the Gospel from which few dramatists can abstain, as when Pilate's wife stabs herself in the arm on hearing the news of the Crucifixion. Technically, the production throughout was first-rate; for example the way in which, by the skilful use of "crowd voices" from various parts of the Church, the congregation was incorporated in to the crowd at the Crucifixion, stands out as one of the most effective incidents in the play, establishing the fact that this is not just a performance to be witnessed but one calling for "audience participation" in the truest sense.

A surprise to me was the extraordinary way in which the ancient Cornish Resurrection Play, written some seven centuries earlier, so starkly simple, almost childlike, so full of typical medieval anachronisms, followed so naturally and adequately upon *Good Friday*. I was expecting an anti-climax and found instead just what was needed as an Epilogue to the Masefield.

J. B. G.

Central London

The Way of the Cross: two productions.

No production of *The Way of the Cross* is like any other production. There seems no end to the interpretations of Ghéon's most famous play (so far, for instance, in six productions I have counted four completely different ways for Simon to say, "All right . . . all right . . ."). Ghéon has written spare, taut lines of dialogue, leaving action, emphasis and even meaning in some places to be supplied by individual producers. This flexibility is part of its strength, permitting the personal feeling of the players to be expressed more directly than a rigid framework of the playwright's own views will usually allow.

Miss Henzie Raeburn's production at Holy Redeemer Church, Clerkenwell, stemmed from that of the Pilgrim Players during the war: that combination of speech and mime that looks so completely natural because it is in fact so severely schooled and meticulously timed.

The altar of this church is set well forward, raised on steps and framed by heavy pillars, so that two or three Stations could be played with hardly a break, and the procession could pass out of sight for a few moments by one of the approaches thus formed. This grouping was helpful; it is always difficult for audiences to sustain the steady pace of *The Way of the Cross* for an hour without a few moments of relaxed tension. Though the players were not equal in experience and the result was sometimes uneven, they performed with a real devotion that communicated itself to the congregation. The performance began after Evensong and was followed by Benediction; the often misapplied term "act of worship" was a fitting description of the whole.

John Downing's production in the chapel of King's College, London, used a much larger group with impressive effect. The chapel is broad, with pews facing inward to a centre aisle; so a series of elevations were erected down the aisle, and the action moved Station by Station from the west doorway towards the chancel, where the Crucifixion Stations were played. The Reader stood

in the pulpit, and three speakers, observers outside the action, were grouped on the chancel steps. They were given most of the lines, and the effect of the few lines spoken by the actors themselves was proportionately strong.

Another unusual feature was a deliberate economy in the use of mime. The usual tendency is to "ginger it up" with as much movement and invention as possible. Here, the effect was of a series of frescoes: violent motion suddenly arrested, and recorded with dispassionate clarity. There was more "drama" in the conventional sense of the word in the Sibelius and Shostakovitch music used as "bridge passages". This restraint (being planned and not simply unimaginative) was remarkably moving, and the whole group showed a fine sense of discipline and dedication.

B. J.

* * *

Christchurch, New Zealand

Everyman was performed in the nave of Christchurch Cathedral, New Zealand again this year in mid-Lent. The standard of performance was so high that the Christchurch Religious Drama Society would do well to emulate Salzburg and make the play an annual event.

The early part of the play, which consists mainly of dialogues between Everyman and single allegorical figures, does not lend itself very well to "arena" production and it is difficult to avoid a certain amount of inaudibility. To overcome this it is inevitable that Everyman should pace the rotunda at frequent intervals and this can become tedious to watch. However, the entrance, in the second half of the play, of Good Deeds and her five sisters, gives far better scope for arena work and this, the producer handled with considerable skill. His production throughout was careful, and in choosing his most accomplished actor to speak, unseen by the audience, the Voice of God, he caused the play to begin and end on the very highest note. Special praise is due for the excellence of the costuming, the standard of the work being well worthy of the lovely building in which it was performed.

W. DE LA B.

Durham

Charles Williams' all too rarely performed *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury* was produced at Durham in March, on behalf of the Durham Colleges Student Christian Movement, by a second-year ordinand from St. John's College, with a cast of undergraduates also drawn mainly from St. John's.

The difficulty of managing a large cast on a very small stage was overcome by the use of three acting areas and the steps between: the floor of the hall, used for processions and by the protesting Commons, the stage itself, and the raised dais on which stood King Henry's throne. Dark and light blue draperies behind this, with a crown at their central point, and the same colours counterchanged on the steps, provided a focus for the bright clothes of the characters. Changes of scene during the two acts, which cover the years 1528–1556, were marked by appropriate verses from the Psalms sung in plainsong by four voices from the floor of the hall. One of the singers had also written special music for the songs in the play.

The producer was lucky in having three actors in the main parts who were obviously able to use their own intelligence and to accept direction over the speaking of Williams' intensely concise and individual verse. The player of the Skeleton, Figura Rerum, the "Love that will not let me go", the "Back of Christ", by whom the play must stand or fall, brought to the part both the grace of movement and power of stillness which it requires, and invested it with an ironic, comprehending compassion that would, I think, have very much pleased the author.

The producer is to be congratulated on his skill in consistently varying the pace to suit the mood of the fifteen scenes and in conveying an impression of movement and pageantry out of all proportion to his limited means. It is to be hoped that other groups will follow the lead of these Durham undergraduates and attempt this difficult but extremely impressive play.

P. B.

* * *

West Molesey, Surrey

Education has been defined as "Life acting on life, through life" and if Religious drama is to play the part it

should in the evangelisation of England it must be just that—the Spirit of God acting upon men through those who have a burning zeal for the coming of His Kingdom. The truth of this was demonstrated a short time ago when a group of Communicants of St. Peter's, West Molesey, presented in their Church, a modernised version of *Everyman*. The producer deliberately underlined the message of the play by the use of present-day speech, music and dance.

Thus the action opened with Everyman embracing Beauty in the person of an attractive and seductive woman of the streets. They were interrupted by Death, a mysterious masked figure, who summoned Everyman to appear before God. The distraught man pleaded for time in which to get support in this ordeal. He turned first to Friendship, who would have none of him; then to his earthly relatives, who likewise deserted him.

Next he sought the help of his Worldly Goods, but Goods, a comic red-faced bookmaker, laughed at him with evident enjoyment at his discomfiture. Comic relief was also provided by Strength—a professional boxer—Five Wits, his second and Discretion his manager, who came in to the music of "The Entry of the Gladiators". At first they seemed willing to support Everyman, but Strength soon threw in the towel and there remained only Good Deeds and Knowledge.

Good Deeds, who at the beginning had been a coldly efficient secretary, typing out Everyman's record card, at this point fell to the ground in a state of collapse. Topical music had been recorded for these scenes: Bessy Smith singing "The Blues", "Stay away from me 'cos I'm in Sin"; "Poor Man Blues" and "Nobody knows you when you're down and out".

Knowledge promised his help and with this support Everyman turned to the practice of his Religion. The instruments of the Passion were brought on to the stage and Everyman went into the Confessional, after which Death appeared again, carrying the purple stole. The Penitent went off stage to receive his Viaticum and Holy Unction to the strains of "The Saints come Marching Home".

During the time that Everyman was absorbed in the affairs of Eternity the World at Play was typified by Strength, who practised Shadow boxing, while Discretion and Beauty jived and Good Deeds (restored to strength by Everyman's conversion) danced a foxtrot with Knowledge.

Everyman, having done his part, and supported by Good Deeds and Knowledge hastened, to the tune of "The Bugle Call Rag", gladly to embrace Death, who throwing off her mask and grey robe, was revealed in a dress of gold lamé holding out her arms to welcome Everyman to the Heavenly habitation.

Finally there appeared in the centre of the back of the stage a great fluorescent Crucifix, a reminder that Eternal life was purchased by the human death of the Son of God.

The presentation was bold, and rightly so, for this is not merely a medieval story; it is the destiny of every man in every age to be called to render an account of his life in the world.

In the sixteenth century men were drawn away from God by the chimera of the Renaissance, in the twentieth they seek material prosperity under the shadow of the Hydrogen Bomb—but in every century security can be found only in God and attained by Christian men through the faithful use of the Sacraments and that final perseverance which converts the grim figure of Death into the harbinger of Life.

It is important that the play was presented in Church, with the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the Lady Chapel. This undoubtedly helped to create a devotional atmosphere and to banish any staginess which might have crept into a theatre or Church hall. It is good that talent expressed in the modern idiom should be so consecrated to the Service of God to remind us of our vocation—to serve Him on Earth and to enjoy Him for ever in Heaven.

M. G. R.

* * *

Godalming, Surrey

For their 1958 production the Deanery Players turned to the Old Testament

story of the life of Abraham and Sara, his wife. The play, Gordon Daviot's *The Little Dry Thorn*, was enthusiastically received by very large audiences.

The story, taken from Genesis, was beautifully written, and this made a smooth performance possible. It was particularly refreshing to hear the spontaneous laughter at the humorous dialogue mainly by Milcah at the expense of Lot; the first chuckle was possibly uncertain, but when it was realised it was not out of place to laugh during a religious play, the audiences really enjoyed themselves.

The backbone of the play, of course, was Abraham's unshakable Faith. In the first Act Abraham receives the Message to leave his comfortable life in Ur, and nothing can prevent him from going into the country with his family " at the bidding of a Voice ". The real message came in the last Act when Sara, too, finds Faith.

The entire cast, including Ishmael, son of Abraham and Hagar—intelligently played by a young twelve year-old—gave a most sincere performance. In the local press reports emphasis was made on the high standard achieved by the Deanery Players, who choose to do one play a year and to give it their best. This event now appears to be established in the Guildford Diocese Calender for the week preceding Holy Week.

* * *

North Greenford, Middlesex

All Hallows' Church, beginning to develop a group, made a good choice in *According to the Scriptures* by Elizabeth Heward, for their production in the Church on Passion Sunday. A small chorus and reader, using Bible words, gave a formalised dramatic reconstruction of the Passion, the psalm-like interludes between the Seven Words from the Cross helping to create a close concentration in the listeners.

The players moved well and there were some memorable groups when a gesture or white part of a costume was caught in the single strong light. The church is modern, with a good space in the choir, though as this is not raised the players were sometimes not well seen, and the eye was led to the background when this was not significant. There was a good use of music as part of the production. S. B.

Hendon

The Epworth Players, the dramatic club of the Hendon Methodist Church presented a most successful production of Ladislas Fodor's play, *The Vigil*, in their Church during Holy Week. They are lucky to possess a striking and modern church the chancel of which, with very little adaptation, made an impressive court room setting. This coupled with imaginative lighting made the production visually most effective.

A number of members of the congregation took small parts in the production, and the Players were very pleased that their Minister was able to play the important part of The Judge for them.

Far from being handicapped by the lack of a stage, the whole company were inspired by being able to use their Church to such advantage to present the Easter story in this brilliant modernised version.

Not only were Church members moved by the presentation, but a great number of other friends from outside attended the performance and the short service preceding it.

A. G. H.

* * *

Hull

In February, the Company of the Wain gave the first amateur performance in this country of *La Chapelle Ardente* (*The Funeral Pyre*) by Gabriel Marcel. Behind this bald statement went all the usual wrestling over the choice of play. At this stage of their existence the Company wanted to play on a stage, not in a church; to have a set not a chancel screen; to have real dramatic situations not surprise centre aisle entrances; to have chairs and sofas and not well-covered beer crates.

Marcel fulfilled all these conditions and more. *The Funeral Pyre* is a concentrated presentation of deaths and resurrections in close family relationships. Marcel's penetration in the ambiguities and ambivalence of human motive and action both repel and attract, his characters each compel our love and hatred, sympathy and disgust. The production aimed at preserving the balance and preventing the characters from appearing as black and white.

As a curtain raiser, the Company gave a lively performance of *Sweeney Agonistes*

a fragment written by T. S. Eliot in the 1920's.

As an epilogue the Company invited the audience to take part in a discussion of the two plays, led by members of the teaching staff in the English and French departments of the University of Hull. The discussions were illuminating not only on the content of the plays but also on the pros and cons of these "pre-Christian" plays (both written before their authors officially became members of the Church) being performed by a specialist group in religious drama.

During the Easter Week the Company were in Edinburgh. They took part in the great Edinburgh Student Christian Congress, and performed Charles Williams' plays *The House by the Stable* and *Grab and Grace* daily in the delightful University Theatre.—F. G.

* * *

Malvern, Worcs

This Eastertide the New World Players gave performances, in five different Churches, of an Eastertide mime entitled *That We Might Live*, specially devised for us by the producer Mary Dixey. In style it is similar to *The Way of the Cross*, but there is less speaking (apart from the Reader, who unfolds the story from the Gospels as the mime proceeds) and the story is taken up to the appearance of our Lord on Easter Day. The events of Good Friday and Easter are enacted by a small cast who in turn portray the main characters of the drama and also members of the crowd, the Roman soldiers and the Disciples. (This was most effective in the smaller Churches where a large cast would have been difficult to group.)

Despite our own private doubts, the mime grew and gradually came to life, and at the performances there were moments which thrilled even those of us who had been with it from the beginning . . . the echoing cries of "Away with Him, Crucify Him" as the "crowd" ran the full length of the Church at the end of the Trial before Pilate . . . the poignant moment when St. John roused Mary, the Mother of Jesus, lying prostrate by the Cross, and helped her slowly down the aisle . . . the joy of the disciples when the Risen Lord (not actually portrayed) appeared in their midst . . . and the tableaux that had as a background Chorales from Bach s Passion Music.

We wondered what impact the mime would have on the various congregations—this medium does not appeal to everyone—but we have been most encouraged by the way it was appreciated at each Church we visited.

Success was in great measure due to the fact that the congregations were drawn into the mime by the prayers and hymns which linked each stage together, thus making the whole an act of corporate worship.—"Backstager."

* * *

Portslade, Sussex

A production of *Redemption* (Freda Collins) was given in the Church of St. Nicholas, Portslade, Brighton, on the first three evenings of Holy Week.

More than twenty actors took part, and the Producer is to be congratulated in so successfully welding together the varied ages of both sexes into such good team-work. Although the Chorus work needed strengthening in a few places, the total effect was alive. The choice of music, which included a good Choir, added greatly to the atmosphere of the play.

As one member of the audience said: "We forget so easily. This is just what we needed to help us during Holy Week."

* * *

Sevenoaks, Kent

The Chantry Mystical Players gave two impressive performances of the Passion play, *In Three Days*, on Sunday, April 13th, in St. Mary's Church, Riverhead (Sevenoaks) and on Tuesday, April 22nd, in St. Mary's Church, Westerham.

Although the play excludes any scenes of the actual Trial or the Crucifixion, the impact of the tragic crisis is dramatically built up by various characters bringing in reports of happenings as they impressed them.

The production maintained the standards and tradition inspired by the Society's founder, Lt.-Col. Ronald Grant.

The ten members of the cast—five men and five women—played their characters with dignity, and deep sincerity, and the play was followed with wrapt attention by each of the congregation.—G. H.

Sheffield

A new Sheffield company, *Libra*, directed by Linden Huddlestone, gave four performances of *A Sleep of Prisoners* by Christopher Fry in the outlying churches of Chapeltown, Wentworth, Brightside and Wortley in February 1958.

A month later Professor G. Wilson Knight's suggestions for a Christian interpretation of *Macbeth* in " Principles of Shakespearian Production " were put into effect by Mr. Huddlestone at Ecclesfield Grammar School. The permanent set contained, specially lit, a Throne, and a Madonna and child statue, which were used by the actors to point the conflict of ambition and conscience, of evil and good, in the play, and to underline the pervading religious imagery of the play so often obscured by a now fashionable over-emphasis of the savage and grotesque.

Recent productions by the school have also included Ann Ridler's *The Shadow Factory*, and the first stage presentation of Clive Sansom's poetic sequence of New Testament characters, *The Witnesses*.

* * *

St. John's Wood

Charles Williams' *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury* is a play of great richness and subtlety that grips the imagination strongly. It is also " difficult "—not through obscurities of expression that the dramatist could easily have avoided, but because Williams was one of those rare writers, like Blake, who created their own terms of reference and one needs some previous knowledge of the meaning he gives to certain key words and symbols. In this play also he assumes that Cranmer's story is so familiar that he can use it as a well-known tune on which to descant; for example, " the woman Joan " is mentioned in passing, and given the significance of Beatrice for a moment, but only someone already versed in Cranmer's life-story could catch the reference and appreciate it. When the references are really familiar, as in the scene of the writing of the Prayer Book, this poetic counterpoint is beautiful and impressive, and the value of the play is such that it is well worth the necessary study to understand it.

The figure of the Skeleton, the bare bones of reality—a deliberately ambiguous figure—moves through the gorgeous Tudor pageant turning it into a Holbein " Dance of Death ", linking historical characters with modern audience. In the Players of the Wood production at St. John's Church, in February, the Skeleton wore a great cloak and a skullcap, suggesting Harlequin (whose character as " advocate for the dead " would not be inappropriate). His swift balletic movements contrasted vividly with the natural gesture of the humans; and his mimed crowning of Queen Mary was such a characteristic touch that it was hard to believe that Williams had not invented it. The whole production was indeed excellently thought out.—B. J.

* * *

Waltham Cross

The Holy Trinity Guild of Players presented Philip Turner's *Christ in the Concrete City* in Waltham Cross parish church on the evenings of Palm Sunday, the Wednesday in Holy Week, and Good Friday. Here was a play which speaks a language people can understand. Its message is direct, compulsive, unrelenting, and indeed shocking. The Passion of Christ is displayed not as a tragic happening of long ago, but something in which we are all involved here and now. In this play the drama becomes the instrument by which the Word of God is preached; and no sermon could do it half so well. There is no doubt that *Christ in the Concrete City* became a talking-point in the parish. It made people think, for, as one newspaper critic wrote, " no punches are pulled " and it shocks us out of our complacency. It was a very worth-while piece of evangelism, for the play brought many folk into church on Good Friday who would not otherwise have entered the door. Everyone concerned in the production spent some time together in prayer in the Lady Chapel before the play commenced each evening.—E. M. N.